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## Introduction: Global Citizenship Education for Learning/Volunteering Abroad

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**ABSTRACT:** For several years Canadian universities and colleges have been expanding opportunities for students to learn and/or volunteer abroad for academic credit. Many of these study abroad programs are directed to the European Union, Singapore and other “business opportunity” destinations. For this collection, however, we are concerned with travel and study in less developed countries – those countries deemed by the United Nations to be low income whereby the vast majority of residents of the country live, on average, on \$1-\$2 per day. The focus on less developed countries exposes the specific ethical dilemmas one encounters abroad as a result of economic disparities, cultural differences, historical circumstances and social situations linked, for example, to the legacy of colonialism. This introduction provides context and background information on learn/volunteer abroad programs, the diverse opportunities available to college and university students, the potential impact of these programs, and the relationship (perceived or real) of learn/volunteer abroad programs, and global citizenship education.

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## Introduction: The Demand for Learn/Volunteer Abroad Programs

The impetus for expanding study abroad programs in less developed countries comes from multiple sources, including a desire among colleges and universities to internationalize beyond their traditional Eurocentric parameters. Students themselves are pressing the agenda. Indeed, the demand for opportunities to learn abroad far exceeds the capacity of post-secondary institutions to offer reasonably priced programs that many students can afford. A growing number of students entering college and university programs have already volunteered abroad whether through church groups, organized high school tours, family holidays, or personal initiative. The demand for learn/volunteer abroad programs is linked to the benefits and skills youth acquire through these experiences. A recent study of students in the Global Development Studies program (DEVS) at Queen's University found overwhelming support for international work-study courses as a way to

enrich their academic learning with practical, hands-on experience, and to help launch them into careers. As one returnee put it, “*This is HANDS DOWN the most influential, productive, life changing and, downright, best course DEVS has to offer.*” The main obstacle to even higher take-up of opportunities is cost.<sup>1</sup> College and university students have pointed to the socio-economic factors that enable or prevent some youth from participating in these programs. Some institutions, such as Dalhousie, offer a subsidy for students who are unable to pay the full costs of learn/volunteer abroad program.

There are also government funded initiatives for Canadian youth such as the Association for Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) program, Students for Development (SFD). Students who take part in the SFD program are required to spend a minimum of three months and up to six months in a developing country in a volunteer or intern capacity. They must complete several academic assignments to gain course credit or (at the graduate level) do research leading to an MA thesis. This federally-funded program has facilitated more than 1000 students in their practicum placements since 2005 and, in 2010, significantly expanded its scope (AUCC, 2010). One aspect of the program is that returning students are requested (and modestly funded) to propagate knowledge about federal development priorities to the wider Canadian public.<sup>2</sup> Private corporations have also joined the bandwagon in the pursuit of profit. In a major initiative, Blyth Worldwide has launched a joint venture with Queen’s University to enable students to take intensive courses in (for now) six countries abroad. It markets the initiative with appeals to superior learning, social responsibility, and tourism opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

## **International Practicum Placements and Learn Abroad Opportunities in Canadian Universities and Colleges**

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Many learn/volunteer abroad programs offered by Canadian universities are administered by programs or departments of International Development Studies (IDS) or Global Studies. There are more than 22 such undergraduate programs available within Canada and more than six universities are offering graduate level studies in Global/International Development Studies in Canada. Some universities such as Dalhousie offer opportunities for spring and summer term learn abroad programs such as the Cuba Study Tour which takes place in late April and early May, and the Africa Field School which takes place in May in East Africa. Most universities offer terms abroad whereby students can spend the semester in a developing country taking academic courses at local partner universities. An add-on feature to many of these programs is structured volunteer placements and practicum learning. University of Calgary, for example, offers Term Abroad Programs in India and China. Trent University offers two eight month programs in Ghana and Ecuador which combines in-class learning in these countries as well as practicum learning through volunteer placements and homestays. Menno Simon’s College – an affiliate of the University of Winnipeg – offers placements for students locally and internationally. This is merely a snapshot of some of the international learn/volunteer abroad programs available to youth in Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Queen’s University. 2011. *DEVS 410 SurveyMonkey Report*. Unpublished paper. Department of Global Development Studies, compiled by Molly Fremes.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aucc.ca/programs-services/international-programs/students-for-development/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.queensblythworldwide.ca/About>

However, interest in international volunteer/study/learn abroad programs is not specific to the experiences of international development studies students. Students from business, environmental studies, engineering, international social work, and health programs (medical schools, physiotherapy, nursing, etc) are all major contributors to volunteer/learn abroad programs. The students in a range of academic disciplines can take part in the growing number of international placements available to them. Engineering students may choose to volunteer with Engineers without Borders as one of many options available to them for international learn/volunteer abroad experience. Other program specializations offer learn/volunteer abroad opportunities for students in nursing, medicine, physical therapy/sports therapy, and social work, to name a few.

Within Canadian colleges programs such as Humber College's International Development Management Studies program, offer practicum placements for students to work in developing countries. Centennial College's Global Citizenship & Equity initiative is also worthy of note, as it does not simply offer discrete Service Learning courses for its students. Rather, critical reflection on these courses is threaded into the wider curriculum in what Centennial terms a "transformative approach". This approach puts social justice and action, effective leadership skills and the promotion of global citizenship at the heart of the degrees and diplomas offered at the College. Critical reflection on the ways that colonizing or moralistic agendas may be embedded in the traditional model of service learning is thus part of the College's Signature Learning Experience (SLE) or institutional identity. The SLE encompasses professional development for *all* faculty, a mandatory Social Analysis to Social Action course for *all* students, and the integration of Global Citizenship and Equity learning outcomes into *all* courses, among other innovations.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Impact of Learning Abroad Programs**

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International learn/volunteer abroad programs are a normalized part of the educational curriculum. However, they have not been a particular area for scrutiny. The benefits are typically more assumed than studied. As the number of learn abroad programs grow and the demand for such programs also grows, it is important to begin to reflect critically on the impact of experiential learning opportunities, the motivations of students who take these courses, and the ethical dilemmas that need to be considered.

From a positive perspective, it is argued that experiential learning programs can enhance students' moral development and commitment to social justice issues (Ehrlich 1997; Sax & Austin, 1997). In words evocative of Grusky (2000), Kraft (1997) further explains that:

It is cross-cultural settings within our own society and internationally that the most powerful, life-changing experiential learning can, and often does, occur. We may be shattered by culture shock, but if we persevere, the lessons can be overwhelmingly powerful and life-changing. I believe it is only when all of the cues which prop up our racial, gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural biases are knocked out from under us, that we can begin the process of becoming caring and compassionate people who can reach beyond the individual child in our own culture who is in distress, and begin to reach out to a world filled with millions of suffering and dying people. (p.162)

Or, as of one of the students in the Queen's survey gushed:

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.centennialcollege.ca/AboutCentennial/sle>

A unique opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of development work, that adds an irreplaceable and enriching dimension to a degree in development studies, and allows for personal and intellectual growth at an unprecedented level. (Queen's U. 2011)

However, Kauffmann, Martin and Weaver (1992) caution, based on their research and participant interviews with study abroad students, that a "first cross-cultural experience is more likely to produce personal growth than to increase in-depth cultural and global understanding" (p.75). The benefits of learn/volunteer abroad programs are mostly one-directional, benefiting those who travel abroad much more than those who are meant to be the beneficiaries of this development assistance. Scott-Villiers (2004) argues that a key factor in deepening students' learning is the sharing of information between the sending organization and the host organization to the extent that it turns the idea of provider and recipient, the giver and the taker, "into a spiral of reciprocity" (p.208). If the learning experience is cultivated in this manner, there is room for positive identity development and the reconstruction of perceptions and assumptions.

An alternative approach is advocated by Catherine Vertisi (1999) whose work highlights the need for mutuality. She notes that the increased globalization of business, growing numbers of new immigrants to Canada, and growing awareness of transnational problems (such as the environment) require an even greater response from educational institutions, especially if post-secondary institutions are to continue to play a critical role in preparing leaders for tomorrow. Her findings suggest that Canadian students who travel abroad have an important impact on internationalizing universities. On the other hand, so too do experiences that involve learning from international students. Vertisi contends that efforts to promote global citizenship must look more seriously at the exchange opportunities for youth to travel to or from Canada. In order to facilitate this, barriers need to be eliminated for international students who would like to study in Canada, namely the high/differential tuition fees.

In previous research, the authors have examined the perceived benefits of learn/volunteer abroad programs; particularly, the perception among youth of an improved understanding of the world, enhanced cross-cultural awareness, and open-mindedness (Tiessen, 2005). Marc Epprecht's (2004) examination of work-study abroad courses provides a rare but important overview of the historical origins and philosophies guiding many of the current study/work abroad components of IDS programs in North America. Epprecht challenges the rigour of these programs, particularly in terms of addressing ethical issues around who gains and who loses. His findings suggest that IDS work-study abroad programs may do more harm than good for both Canadians and the partners in less developed countries if the profit flows only or predominantly north-ward, a point that resonates both with Vertisi's focus on mutual learning and with a strong hint of cynicism among the surveyed Queen's students:

The idea of travelling overseas to do development work also makes me quite uncomfortable. In class we're taught about everything that is wrong with programs like this so it is quite contradictory to then turn around and offer them to students. It seems that what is being taught in classrooms does not correspond with what students want to hear and rather than deal with the reality of what it means to be able to do "development work", you are allowing students to leave what they've learned in the classroom and turn back to their pre-DEVS notions of "saving the Africans". DEVS

410 should be discontinued. It privileges wealthy students and allows them to feel good about themselves as they spent their summer volunteering, while us "selfish" and "uncompassionate" students stayed home and worked for ourselves. It also goes against the very foundations of what our professors are trying to teach us. I know this would not be a popular opinion amongst DEVS students, but I think we need to stop indulging our privilege and really critically analyze the program as a whole. (Queen's U. 2011)

Boyle, Nackerud, and Kilpatrick (2001) and Krajewski-Jaime, Brown, Ziefert and Kaufman (1996) contend that international placements offer an effective, if somewhat traumatic, way for American social work students to quickly develop cultural competence. The result of such experiences is stated as the development of an international identity. Other research on international learning experiences for health professionals has concluded that short-term (less than three months) study abroad programs had a positive influence on cognitive development (Haloburdo and Thompson, 1998; Shieh, 2004; Walsh, 2003; Zorn, Ponick and Peck, 1995). More specifically, a study surveying the long-term impact of international education opportunities found that the nurses participating in three- to four-month placements reported higher long-term impact than those participating in three- to four-week programs. The strongest impact that was found was the enhancement of global understanding and personal growth (Zorn, 1996).

Other key Canadian literature analysing the impact of volunteers abroad has focussed on long term volunteers acting as Development Workers in low income countries. Barbara Heron's book *Desire for Development* and Nancy Cook's work on *Gender, Identity and Imperialism* provide useful insights into some of the ethical dilemmas of working abroad, in particular the tensions between Canadians' desire to do something in a helpful, practical sense, and their desire to feel moral within the parameters of multiple privileges. The growing body of scholarship, examining the impact of learn/volunteer abroad programs, demonstrates both positive and negative consequences. The common theme running through this literature, however, is that benefits are largely accrued among the Canadian youth who travel abroad and measured in terms of personal growth and skills development. The one-directional nature of perceived benefits is central to the ethical dimensions of learn/volunteer abroad programs. Tiessen's paper, in this collection, examines the ethical implications of these perceptions and the self-oriented or egoistic motivations that contribute to this form of navel-gazing and perpetuation of western privilege.

## **Global Citizenship Education**

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As noted above, participation in learn/volunteer abroad programs is believed to foster more engaged citizens, a view sometimes expressed in quite hyperbolic terms. In an analogy offered by Bringle and Hatcher (2011), the authors equate the pedagogical approach of international service learning (ISL) to the discovery of a cure for cancer in terms of our need for celebration of its benefits. They note that "ISL holds the potential and may be a pedagogy that is best suited to prepare college graduates to be active global citizens in the 21st century" (p. 3).

Part of the growing desire for a cross-cultural experience in the developing world is arising from the rhetoric of global citizenship found in university pamphlets and on college websites, in development agency propaganda, and in the advertisements of volunteer sending agencies (for profit and not-for-profit organizations). The ways that learn/volunteer abroad programs are "sold"

to youth can have a profound impact on the expectations and motivations expressed by participants in these programs.

This desire for global understanding as expressed by many students who learn/volunteer abroad has both contributed to and grown from the desire for global citizenship – an elusive concept that has many and contradictory definitions. Nonetheless, a growing body of literature addressing global citizenship can be found in academic scholarship and policy documents. This literature presents a range of perspectives on the term and its definitions. For the purpose of this collection, we draw on the definition of global citizenship as a way of understanding the world in which an individual's *attitudes and behaviours* reflect a compassion and concern for the marginalized and/or poor and for the relationship between poverty and wealth - within and between communities, countries, and regions (Heron and Tiessen, 2007).

The term global citizenship is part of a broader conception of global cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan governance. The latter terms reflect a vision of a move from national to regional governance. The terms denote a new regionalism or a strengthened global civil society supported by a new “normative architecture” of world order values. Falk (1994) calls it global democracy/humane global governance building on the work of Polanyi's “human society”. Global cosmopolitanism emphasizes the role of community on the global level as well as the formation of global norms.

Robert Kaplan's work highlights a different perspective expressed in the concept of “global cosmopolitanism” which he says is: “a world of multiple passport holders and others whose business and income give them easy access to many countries even as they have less and less of a stake in any particular one of them” (Kaplan, 2005). Global cosmopolitans claim little or no accountability to government, fellow voters or even geographical space.

The themes of global citizenship and learn/volunteer abroad run through the philosophical base of the various Canadian Youth Employment Strategy programs. The stated objectives of the federal government's Youth Employment Strategy are centred on the concept of what Canadians can *learn* in order to enhance individual employability and ultimately, Canada's competitiveness globally (Government of Canada, 2001). The youth link of the government of Canada's official website is headed “International – Find out what it means to be a *citizen in the global community*” (Youth, 2004; italics added). For those internships implemented through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the theme of global citizenship is quite explicit: CIDA offers an online magazine entitled “Global citizenship in action” (CIDA, 2004). Industry Canada's NetCorps internships are similarly based on the federal government's “Connecting Canadians” strategy which is intended to “make Canada the most connected country in the world” (NetCorps Canada International, 2004). In 2004, the Young Professional International Program run by what was then DFAIT (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade) advertised itself as “Opening the Door to an International Career” (DFAIT, 2004). Given that CIDA, DFAIT, and other federal agencies have elsewhere promoted policies such as structural adjustment and “free trade” that have demonstrably contributed to global economic disparities, could this instrumental approach to global citizenship be contributing to the very problems IDS otherwise tends to be most critically attuned to?

For many people, travelling abroad can be an expense they are unable to afford. It can also be a choice about how they feel they can have an impact, local and familiar being less overwhelming than foreign and strange. Many young people are thus choosing to stay “at home” to complete their global citizenship education. Many universities (Menno Simon’s and Dalhousie, for example), offer experiential learning programs for students to get academic credit based on what they accomplish in their home communities. It may involve volunteering with locally based international development organizations, NGOs, immigrant centres, college programs that do outreach with migrant workers, or on aboriginal issues. There is as well the issue of accommodating international students within the Canadian context. The Students for Development (SFD), for example, has a component that enables students from the partner institution in the developing world to come to Canada for a placement in a Canadian NGO that would enrich their academic, comparative studies on a wide range of development issues.

This group of individuals may one day have opportunities for international travel through the organizations for which they end up working; or, in the case of international students coming to Canada, may end up in responsible positions in their home countries. Another issue of potential concern at the graduate level in particular is when international students remain in Canada after completing their internship, contributing to the “brain drain” that enriches Canada at the expense of the source country. It is important, therefore, to understand the nature of global citizenship education for those in Canada and for those who may participate from outside Canada or as recent immigrants to the country. What are the ethical issues that emerge in the teaching and facilitation of global citizenship education courses for these diverse groups of people? And how can we make sense of this in light of the current pressure for the internationalization of post-secondary institutions within Canada? The papers in this collection address these questions from diverse perspectives and programs.

## Summary

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The literature examined in this introduction suggests that going to learn or volunteer in a developing country, whether for a few weeks, a few months, or a few years, has many positive impacts for Canadians. Those who are willing and able to participate in this way are believed to achieve broadened outlooks that are expected to endure over time. They are likely to acquire a new sense of personal identity, skills, confidence, and knowledge, and to be active volunteers in their own communities on returning to Canada. However, a more critical perspective can also be found throughout the literature, whether the focus is on students from International Development Studies programs or other academic disciplines that are increasingly encouraging students to learn/volunteer abroad (particularly Engineering, Medicine, Nursing, Physical Therapy, and International Social Work). In depth studies of the latter particularly raise questions about motivations, what is gained, how this occurs, and what costs are imposed on the assumed beneficiaries in the developing world. The cost of learning/volunteer abroad programs is a central focus of analysis for the papers included in this issue. In particular, the costs are examined in relation to the ethics of participation in learn/volunteer abroad, the egoistic motivations for participation and the implications of a global citizenship discourse infusing these programs.

The notion of global citizenship is invoked in specific programs and fields of study examined in this collection such as international health programs for medical students, or sports for peace and development participants. Articles in this collection challenge the ethical assumptions or absence of

ethical discussion in these specialized programs. The paper by Jorgenson and Shultz offers a frame of reference for the specific analyses that follow. Jorgenson and Shultz examine post-secondary institutions and their global citizenship and internationalization mandates. The authors argue that global citizenship takes on diverse meanings across post-secondary institutions and is also a contested term. The articles that follow address the specific ethical dimensions of some of the programs offered abroad for college and university students.

Robert Huish's article, for example, discusses the ethical challenges of global health education programs and specifically International Health Electives (IHEs). He argues for a restructuring of these programs, particularly in the area of improved pre-departure training in order to circumvent the perpetuation of ethical dilemmas. The ethical dilemmas he examines include the severely under-resourced clinical settings in which IHE learn/volunteer abroad students work and the significance of cultural sensitivity to local workers and patients in developing countries. He challenges the assumptions that medical students have sufficient knowledge for these placements and also challenges the notion that their contributions are a force of good for the poor. A key ethical challenge that emerges from IHE programs, as Huish underscores, is a form of dependence on the part of under-resourced clinics on the medical students who tour them and bring much-needed, but short-term, supplies and resources. The conclusions drawn from this examination point to a failure to scratch the surface of international health challenges and to understand the structural inequalities that shape circumstances in developing countries.

The theme of power and inequality is echoed in Simon Darnell's article in which he argues that we have to move beyond the technical and material fix of sport for development (SPD) programs to an ethos of solidarity. Darnell frames his analysis within the global citizenship literature and reflects on the diverse applications of global citizenship within sport for development initiatives.

Owen Willis' contribution to this collection argues that the religious immersion that students experience while abroad must be considered more carefully before, during, and after placements. There are key ethical challenges that emerge from this understanding of the religious encounters that may be disorienting for youth raised in a largely secular society like Canada. Willis, like Rennick in the subsequent paper, raises the question "where does religion fit in the study abroad experience?" Willis' analysis begins with some personal anecdotes and examples from his own experience that reveal the centrality of religion to the study abroad experience. However, Willis underscores the gap in our preparation process for those going abroad to the significance and prominence of religion in the field of international development. Noting a "lacuna" or blind spot in international development pedagogy, Willis calls for a greater focus on the relationship between religion and development in IDS academic programs. Willis' argument is that the preparation for students who participate in learn/volunteer abroad programs is based in a "rational and secular epistemological framework". He challenges us to consider the ethical implications and power dynamics that emerge from the deeply-held perceptions of what constitutes modern or traditional beliefs and practices.

Rennick's paper also addresses the significance of religion to the international volunteer/learn abroad experience but she does so from a different angle. Rennick's article begins from the perspective that Westerners who learn/volunteer abroad generally have a particular lens through which they see the world. This lens is shaped by Western institutions and can be traced to quasi-



Christian beliefs and practices that shape how we see the world. These institutions and beliefs are also reflected in the motivations for participating in learning/volunteer abroad programs. While Rennick acknowledges that values are shifting from a religious orientation to a secular one, she argues that these same values continue to shape our desires for international volunteering and helping.

The final paper in this collection continues with the theme of motivations. Tiessen's article explores the reasons for participating in learning/volunteer abroad programs among 68 youth participants from colleges and universities in Canada. These interviews resonate with earlier studies, linking international learn/volunteer programs to personal growth and skills development among youth from the global north. Tiessen examines these egoistic or self-oriented motivations as ethical challenges to the extent that they may reinforce inequality in terms of class, race, gender and power. The self-oriented motivations for participation in learning/volunteer abroad programs also reinforce the one-directional flow of benefits mentioned earlier in this introduction. Tiessen concludes that motivations of personal growth in learn/volunteer abroad programs reinforce imbalanced power relations and can reinforce – rather than rectify - old geo-political forms of exploitation. The fact that many of the participants in Tiessen's study construct their understanding of inequality around notions of being lucky or unlucky underscores the need for more intensive pre-departure and return orientation sessions that enable youth to deconstruct inequality and their roles in perpetuating this inequality. In addition to a deeper deconstruction process is the need for pro-active education that can support and contribute to a form of global citizenship based on social justice, solidarity, and equality.

The papers in this volume can be used for the very purposes noted above. We hope the readings provided here can serve as entry points for the sorts of classroom discussions we are advocating. We challenge the readers to embrace the diverse critiques presented here and to present an alternative vision to achieve the goal of a more ethical and reciprocal learn/volunteer abroad experience.

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